

# Australians have their say on radio content and advertising

Listening to commercial radio stations remains a popular activity for the majority of Australians, according to two community research reports released by the ACMA in February.

The reports, *Community attitudes to radio content* and *Listener attitudes to advertising, sponsorship and influence on commercial radio* also found that a large majority of the radio listeners surveyed held strong views on a range of issues including the need to protect privacy in relation to prank calls from radio stations, and that on-air opinions should not be influenced by sponsorship deals.

Commissioned by the ACMA from Ipsos MediaCT, results from both studies will help to inform the public and industry as they make submissions to the ACMA's current review of the commercial radio program standards. *Community attitudes to radio content* also informed the recently reviewed *Commercial Radio Codes of Practice and Guidelines* and two commercial radio investigations.<sup>1</sup> Key results from each study are summarised below.

## Radio remains popular

Listening to commercial radio stations is a popular activity for the majority of Australians. Early in 2009, the ACMA found that 90–95 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over listened to radio, with 91 per cent listening regularly (at least once a week). Commercial FM radio is the most popular (54 per cent listened regularly), followed by ABC stations (40 per cent, not including Triple J), commercial AM radio (25 per cent), Triple J (15 per cent), and community radio (14 per cent). Music, news and information, and talkback are the most preferred radio program formats.

Nielsen research in 2008 found radio listeners aged 10 years and over spent an average of 19 hours and 49 minutes per week listening to radio. Of this group, it was older listeners who spent the most time listening, with those aged 55 years and over spending an average of 24 hours and 53 minutes per week listening to radio.<sup>2</sup>

## Community attitudes to radio content

The *Community attitudes to radio content* study was conducted in February 2009 and used a telephone survey methodology to interview a national representative sample of 1537 household respondents aged 15 years and over, comprising 1423 radio listeners across Australia.

The research covered radio listening patterns, the extent and nature of listener concerns about offensive radio content, attitudes to inappropriate radio content (including content that may be heard by non-target listeners and children), media preferences for news and current affairs, views on advertising, commercial influence and disclosing sponsors in commercial AM radio

current affairs programs, whether and how listeners have made a complaint, and awareness of the commercial radio complaints process.

## Attitudes toward specific content areas

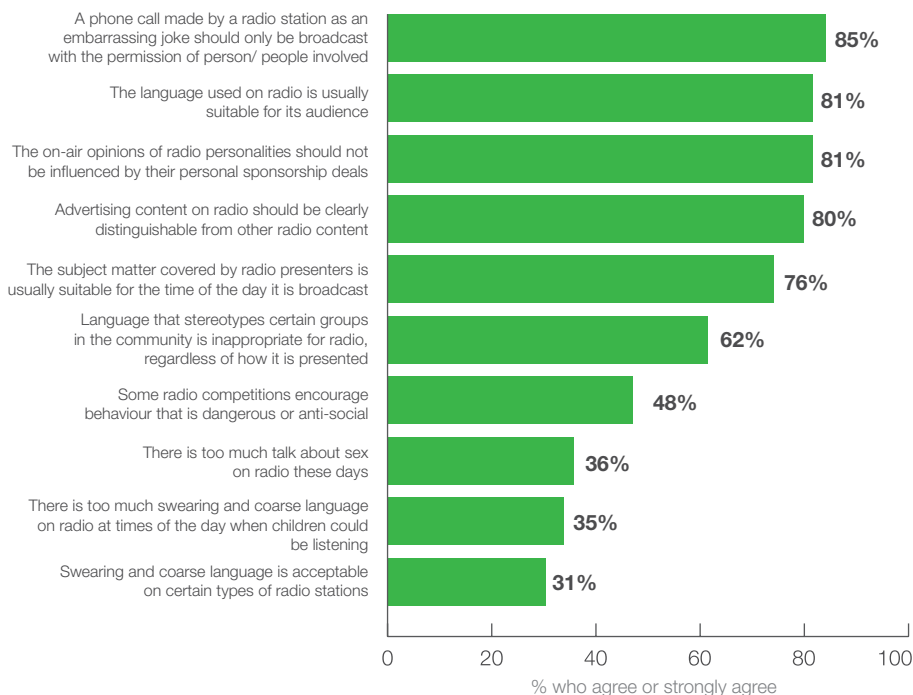
In addition to the strong views held on the need to protect privacy in relation to prank calls from radio stations and on-air opinions not being influenced by sponsorship deals, most radio listeners also believed that advertising should be distinguishable from other radio content. At the same time—with regard to actual radio broadcasts—a substantial majority of radio listeners accepted that the language used on radio, and the subject matter covered by radio presenters is usually suitable. (Figure 1).

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**Figure 1: Agreement with radio attitude statements, 2009**

Base: all radio listeners n=1423

Note: similar levels of agreement were held by commercial radio listeners and all radio listeners.



<sup>1</sup> The two investigations were into: *The Kyle and Jackie O Show* and *Live hosted entertainment radio programs: adequacy of community safeguards for the protection of participants*.

<sup>2</sup> Nielsen Radio Ratings, five mainland state capital cities, 2008, 5.30 am–12 midnight, Monday–Sunday.

Small but significant increases in sensitivity toward swearing and coarse language, sexual references, and the times of day when subject matter is broadcast were evident compared with results from the same questions asked in 2003. For example, fewer listeners believed that 'swearing and coarse language is acceptable on certain types of radio stations' (39 per cent in 2003 compared with 31 per cent in 2009).

**Level of complaints and potential complaints**

Measurement of listener concern about radio content was approached from a number of angles, including whether listeners had complained about radio content or had thought about complaining. Most commercial radio listeners had never thought about making a complaint (69 per cent), but almost a third (31 per cent) had either made a complaint or had thought about making a complaint about inappropriate material heard on radio (Figure 2). The two dominant reasons for not going through with a complaint were it not being worth the effort or trouble

(30 per cent) and not having the time (29 per cent). These were followed by a view that the complaint would not be taken seriously (13 per cent).

**Unprompted concerns about radio content**

At the start of the survey, all radio listeners were asked directly if they had heard anything on radio that concerned or offended them. Most had no concerns, and a total of 22 per cent of radio listeners (24 per cent of commercial radio listeners) said they had heard offensive content in the previous year. An open-ended question was used to elicit the nature of concerns without any prompting from interviewers. Answers were varied and grouped under response categories with the top concerns being offensive language (includes song lyrics), sexual content in programming material and/or advertising, and the immature attitude of some presenters. Categories of concern are summarised in Figure 3.

A similar overall level of listener concern about radio content was found in 2003 (23 per cent compared to 22 per cent

in 2009). In 2009, a new category of concern emerged about inappropriate sex-related advertisements. However, fewer listeners were concerned about the presentation of current affairs programs and news stories, including lower concern about perceived bias.

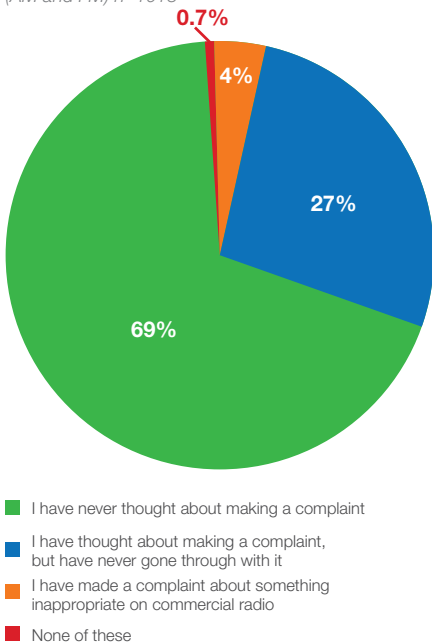
**Advertising in commercial radio current affairs programs**

Commercial radio listeners were more sensitive to advertising in current affairs programs than in non-current affairs programs. Two-thirds of regular commercial radio listeners (66 per cent) believed it is 'extremely' or 'very' important to be able to make a clear distinction between advertising and other content in current affairs programs. The importance of making such a clear distinction in non-current affairs programs is significantly less at 47 per cent. Commercial AM radio talkback listeners held similar views to commercial radio listeners.

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**Figure 2: Complaining about inappropriate radio content by commercial radio listeners, 2009**

Base: regular commercial radio listeners (AM and FM) n=1018



**Figure 3: Areas of (unprompted) concern and/or offence identified by concerned radio listeners, 2009**

Base: all radio listeners who reported offence n=314  
Percentages add to more than 100 per cent due to multiple responses

